Radio talk
Friday, March 3rd.

1

There is no doubt in my own mind, Rocky Mountain House leads Alberta in the export of curious news items, friendliness to strangers, and that special atmosphere that breeds adventure. Perhaps David Thompson, the explorer, touched the region with a magic wand when he wintered at the Fort on highway to the Pacific. Possibly the old Indians endowed the place with their magic; or perhaps the spell goes ever farther back, to the time when the Rocky Mountains were forming. Draw your own conclusions; but take it from me, there's witchery at Rocky Mountain House.

I had heard so much about this fabulous spot, that I almost hesitated about visiting it. Perhaps I had a fear that a mysterious portal would open, and like the fabled traveller of old, would find myself shut within some mystic cavern.

I must confess that this romamtic nonesense was mostly shaken out of me by the railroad CPR, when I rode their thrice-weekly train from Red Deer to Rocky.

The spell came back, though, when I arrived. I was met at the train by the young school inspector, Finlay Barnes, who carried me off to " a typical Rocky Mountain House dinner", and delicious fare it was--baked moose meat with dumplings, and mountain blueberry pie. In the evening I made a little talk in the Legion Hall, and was not at all surprised when a large dog, named Skipper, came gravely in and seated himself on the platform. The townsfolk also took Skipper's presence as a matter of course, and I was informed that the dog was especially fond of music ---

Bach and Beethoven were his favorites---but that he attended every meeting of more than two persons,, and seemed to know before-hand when meetings and concerts were going to take place.

I was much impressed by Skipper,, especially when he arose and offered to shake hands,, just before I began to speak. I told the audience that when the dog walked ~~ix~~ out,, it would be time for me to stop speaking.. I had spoken perhaps six words when Skipper gravely stalked off the platform and walked toward the door. I hurriedly said something about the excellence of a dog's standards of judgement,, which brought Skipper to a halt half-way down the aisle.. He thought the matter over,, finally decided to stick it out and even offered to shake hands again when the talk was over.. Some dog..

But not unusual for Rocky. ~~Rocky folk take Skipper as a matter of course, just as~~ They accept Skipper, just as they accept the Ogopogo. ~~Txxx0xxxxxx~~ For my less well-informed (listening) readers, perhaps I should explain that the Ogopogo is a horrible monster which lives beneath the waters of the North Saskatchewan river,, and has special ~~xxxx xxxxxxx~~ headquarters at Rocky Mountain House.. He ~~x xxxxxxxxxxx~~ or she,, they've never been able to determine which,, is much larger than the Okanagan Lake Ogopogo in British Columbia,, and much more fierce and terrifying than those rather meek Ogopogos occasionally seen in Ontario..

A hint as to the great serpent's sex ~~ix~~ I found in one account which tells of the Ogopogo having been seen shortly before freeze-up last fall,, swimming toward Edmonton with six little Ogopogos happily swimming along in the wake. This would,, I suppose,, seem to imply that the Ogopogo is a female.. I mentioned this tale to a citizen of Rocky who immediately began to suspect the presence of a second Ogopogo--a male.

omit

The Rocky Ogopogo was apparently first viewed by an Indian named Chief Walking Eagle, who staggered into ~~Rocky~~ town one day in 1939, gasping that a " fish fifty feet long, and as big around as an Elephant," had persued him across the river.

When asked where he got the " fire-water," Walking Eagle became most indignant and recited numerous of his Christian virtues.....which settled the matter as far as Rocky was concerned. Folks knew that Chief Walking Eagle was telling the truth.

Unfortunately, the river was frozen over when I visited Rocky, and I was not able to catch a glimpse of the monster. I have promised, however, to return during the month of May, when the Rocky folk have promised to have a special showing of the Ogopogo for my benefit. I haven't a doubt in the world but that they'll really produce a monster. They do such things at Rocky.

One time, back in 1927 to be exact, the gods of the plain and mountain became temporarily angry at Rocky. Why this should be so I have not been able to discover. Possibly it was because ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the region hadn't furnished its usual tribute of mystic events.....whatever it was, it was enough to cause the gods to loose a terrific cyclone on the village. Cyclones were usual in Kansas, where I grew up, but at Rocky, a cyclone seems to ~~be to be~~ meta be the delibrate act of an outraged diety.

The cyclone struck in July after a long spell of oppressive, hot weather. The storm swooped down about three in the afternoon.

and caught the town entirely unprepared.. Folks simply didn't know what was happening. One fellow ran into the open vault of the bank,. while another hopped into a big icebox and slammed it shut. ~~the door shut.~~ Another ~~One~~ man grabbed at the nearest object--the knob of a door.. The wind blew the ~~knob~~ door away and left him holding the knob.. A schoolboy was out in the woodshed when the storm hit.. The cyclone blew the building away,. leaving him standing there with his arms full of kindling wood. The wooden sidewalks along the main street actually changed sides! Down at Arnie Rosses garage an envelope blew right into a plank.....so far in they had to dig it out with a jack-knife. They ~~It~~ didn't dig it out right away, of course. As a matter of f ACT IT STAYED THERE quite a while and became one of the local wonders..

One lady who knew about cyclones from living in South Dakota, was out in her yard.. She took one look at the approaching storm,. knew what to expect, grabbed her ~~b~~baby and dove for the cellar.. She heard the storm hit, knew the house was shaking.. Presently, when it was over, she climbed the cellar steps, only to find that the trap-door was no longer there.. The house had moved six feet! Her husband had to cut a hole in the floor to get her out..

The children at Rocky were especially delighted to find that the storm had carried away the curfew bell.. The bell hasn't been found to this day, but the kids didn't know when they had a good thing,. and now a whistle is ~~was~~ blown for curfew ~~a few years later.~~

One whole side of ~~xxx~~ Main street was demolished with ~~the~~ a single exception. ~~xx~~ One store was left almost undamaged. The Indians were so impressed by this obvious sign of the "Great Spirit's" favor, that they took their trade to that store for years!

But the unusual applies to individuals as well as to Ogopogos & Cyclones.

Izzsxezzxzzmzxzzzzzsxzxexsxexexizxzzxsxexexzxzxexx

Hezexexzxexdxizzxzxzxtxexexzxfxizzxsxzzzxexzxtxexsexexzxzxexx

~~Continuing the narrative of the unusual in Rocky Mountain House, I want to mention that~~ At Rocky* I encountered what I believe to be the only " tree man" in Canada.. His name is John Eagle.. He doesn't live in the tree anymore,, but he did until it blew down.. You see,. John Eagle used to be a sailor.. He travelled around the world more than a dozen times,, saw just about everything there is to see in the world.....and came to settle down in a tree at Rocky Mountain house.. He was tired of the ~~sea~~ ocean and the cities.. He explained: " You see too many strangers in the cities,, and too much of too few strangers on a ship.. The noise and crowds are worse than the wolves and bears.. Of the two evils,, I choose the wolves and the bears!"" He wanted solitude,, and at first he lived in a tent.. But one night a high wind arose and blew the tent down on him.. At the same time he fancied he heard the howling of wolves.. He climbed a tree and spent the night there. The swaying of the tree reminded him of the swaying of the ocean.. He got a wonderful idea! He would build a house in the tree! He began the house the next day.. First he built a platform,, and on the platform he set a tidy little cabin.. He insulated it with shavings from the planing mill,, and finally had a warm,, comfortable dwelling.. Fuel was the biggest problem,, but he solved it by leaning poles up against the platform,, pulling them up,, and sawing them " on his own doorstep!"

makes me remember a tale about a

Sawing wood ~~brings~~ to my mind a former inhabitant of Rocky who bore the impressive name, Silas K. Vandermark. Silas came from Oklahoma, where he was said to have extensive oil holdings. This was borne out by the rolls of money he occasionally had in his possession, but hardly in his appearance; for Silas was a man who had a horror of washing. So great was his affinity for earth, in fact, that he lived in a dug-out some little distance from Rocky. When that dug-out fell in, Silas simply dug another and crawled into it.

It is generally thought that Vandermark's family wanted to get rid of him, and when buying him a railroad ticket, simply touched a spot on the map. To my mind their selection of Rocky is not chance. It is simply more magic.

The fuel problem was easily solved by Silas K. He would simply draw a pole up to the entrance of his dug-out, stick it through the door and into the door of his stove. Whenever the log burned off, he would just shove it in a little farther. This absolutely eliminated any wood-chopping. His kitchen economy also showed ingenuity. Silas would kill a pig, and just hang it up in a tree. He never bothered to dress the pig at all. He'd merely walk out and cut off his morning bacon, ham, or whatever he was after, and let the rest hang.

Whenever he got a shipment of money from his Oklahoma oil fields, Silas would attend local auction sales. He bought large qualities of junk, though what he ever did with it nobody knew.

One time his money was late arriving, so Silas was forced to look for a job. He went to a lumber boss and applied, but the boss was not much impressed with Silas' appearance. He handed

Silas a bar of soap and said: " Here.. Scrub.. Shave.. Get a haircut.. Come back and I'll give you clean underwear,, overalls,, and maybe a job.."

Of course Silas refused.. He stated indignantly that no job was worth that much.. He went back to his cave,, and shortly afterward more money arrived from Oklahoma. Nevermore was Silas forced to humble himself in that manner.

Silas was most kindhearted, and always insisted on offering a visitor something to eat.. Not many cared to partake,, but appreciated the gesture,, just the same.. He would have certain Rocky businessmen write letters for him, but he never let the man who wrote a letter, read the answer.. That, he took to someone else.. He never built any sort of shelter for his pigs and horses.. He simply took the pigs into his cave with him,, and would have done the same thing for the horses,, had there been space.

When he finally died from pneumonia brought on by the general atmosphere and condition of his dug-out,, he had no money.. What did he do with the sums which he received from Oklahoma? He certainly didn't spend them....it's a fact that he neither drank nor smoked. His only expense was auction sales, and all be bought was junk. Did he bury his money? .....Well, a lot of Rocky Mountain House citizens think he did.. In fact, looking for Silas's money is a favorite summer sport.

Rocky Mountain House has two railroads....the CPR and the CNR. When I remarked that this was an interesting if not astounding fact,, I was told about the famous "Battle of Horburg" which once furnished excitement,, not to mention comedy,, on a battlefront sixteen miles long: from Rocky

westward to Horburg.

The CNR was on the job first, and had some twenty miles of grade completed west from Red Deer before the Alberta Central awoke to the fact that a competitor was seriously threatening their territory. The Alberta Central at once began a railway of its own.

The old settlers were amazed! For a long time they had been dreaming of a railroad, but here, in the wink of an eye, were two railroads, working day and night to beat the other out! The old settlers lapsed into happy anticipation of two payrolls, two bridges across the Saskatchewan, two gangs of laborors to feed....in fact double of everything! They didn't mind that the two railways would be easily within whistling distance of each other!

In 1911 the CNR was far in the lead. They had, in fact, laid track to within a mile of Rocky Mountain House. Here, however, they encountered their first serious obstacle in the form of a new piece of grade that cut right across the CNR location.

To the CNR boys the solution was simple and direct. At night they tore the barricade away. By day the Alberta Central boys built it up again.

All this was done with good humor. As T. C. Hargrave, writing in the Calgary Herald says: "On the one side were Swedes, Norwegians, Austrians, Italians; on theother side were Italians, Austrians, Norwegians and Swedes. The battle went on, according to our old-timers, until the ties had been turned four ways and were plumb wore out!"

The river, of course, had to be crossed, before

any train could run on to Hoburg; but the Alberta Central didn't wait to build a bridge just then.. They sent gangs across and built a couple more bridges across the river at right angles to the CNR right-of-way..

This didn't stop the CNR boys.. They jumped the river,, too,, and both outfits began playing leap-frog with stretches of track clear on to Hoburg..

The Alberta Central,, however,, was first to attempt bridging the river.. This was an expensive undertaking,, since their own rails did not yet run to Rocky Mountain House.. They'd been too busy check-mating the CNR.. So the citizens of Rocky saw their pastures turn even greener!! Cement must be hauled from Red Deer,, Lacomb,, Innisfail and Bowden for the new bridge; and it must be hauled by teams,, since nothing could be hauled on the CNR rails..

The cement was hauled; but it was not easy.. The roads were nothing but bogs.. The mules died off under the strain. Oxen were the only animals which could stand up under the heavy loads of cemebt.. As Mr.. Hargraves says: " Skinners left the Calgary and Edmonton Railway with sacks of cement and a fresh shave, and arrived in Rocky with long beards!"

However they received $1..25 per sack for hauling, and the job looked like along one; for as soon as the Alberta Central bridge was completed,, the CNR would certainly begin their own bridge.. However, this dream of fortune was not to come true.. The Railway Commission decided in 1912 that only one bridge was needed across the Saskatchewan,, and decided also that the Alberta Central (now taken over by the CPR) would stop at Rocky Mountain House,, while the CNR would continue on to Horburg and Nordegg.

(D

So if you are interested in knowing,, should you ride from Red Deer to Nordegg on the CNR,, why the train runs for three or four miles on CPR track,, and why it crosses the CPR bridge..... remember the " Battle of Horburg".....possibly the longest battle in Canadian history,, and maybe not yet entirely finished!

30

I think a great deal of the magic which I attach to Rocky Mountain House ~~xxxxxx~~ lies in its romantic name.. It was explained to me that the name was given to the old Fort by John MacDonald of Garth when,, in 1802, the Union Jack ~~xxxx~~ ~~xxxxx